

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke – also 2 Corinthians 12

94. As wax cannot take the imprint of a seal unless it is warmed or softened thoroughly, so a man cannot receive the seal of God's holiness unless he is tested by labors and weaknesses. That is why the Lord says to St Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for you: for My power comes to its fullness in your weakness'; and the Apostle himself proudly declares: 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me' (2 Cor, 12:9). In Proverbs, too, it is written: 'For whom the Lord loves He disciplines; He chastens every son He accepts' (Prov. 3:12. LXX). By weaknesses the Apostle means the attacks made by the enemies of the Cross, attacks which continually fell upon him and all the saints of that time, to prevent them from being 'unduly elated by the abundance of revelations', as he says himself (2 Cor. 12:7). Because of their humiliation they persevered still more in the life of perfection, and when they were treated with contempt they preserved the divine gift in holiness. But by weaknesses we now mean evil thoughts and bodily illnesses. In those times, since their bodies were submitted to deadly tortures and other afflictions, men pursuing the spiritual way were raised far above the passions which normally attack human nature as a result of sin. Today, however, since by the Lord's grace peace prevails in the Church, the bodies of those contending for holiness have to be tested by frequent illnesses, and their souls tried by evil thoughts.

[V1] 292 St Diadochos of Photiki On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination One Hundred Texts

19. The demons try to undermine your inward resolution by buffeting your souls with an untold variety of temptations. Yet out of these many tribulations a garland is woven for you; Christ's power 'comes to its fullness in us in our weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9). It is usually when our situation is most gloomy that the grace of the Spirit flowers within us. 'Light has shone in darkness for the righteous' (Ps. 112:4. LXX) - if, that is, 'we hold fast to our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firmly to the end' (Heb. 3:6).

[V1] 303 St John of Karpathos For the Encouragement of the Monks in India who had Written to Him One Hundred Texts

96. There are four principal ways in which God abandons us. The first is the way of the divine dispensation, so that through our apparent abandonment others who are abandoned may be saved. Our Lord is an example of this (cf. Matt. 27:46). The second is the way of trial and testing, as in the case of Job and Joseph; for it made Job a pillar of courage and Joseph a pillar of self-restraint (cf. Gen. 39:8). The third is the way of fatherly correction, as in the case of St Paul, so that by being humble he might preserve the superabundance of grace (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7). The fourth is the way of rejection, as in the case of the Jews, so that by being punished they might be brought to repentance. These are all ways of salvation, full of divine blessing and wisdom.

[V2] 113 St Maximos the Confessor Four Hundred Texts on Love Fourth Century

91. If you do not accept gratefully the trials which, by God's permission, are inflicted on you for your correction, and do not repent and rid yourself of your conceited opinion that you are righteous, you are given up to captivity, manacles, chains, hunger, death and the sword, and dwell a complete exile from your native land; for you resist the just penalties decreed by God and refuse to submit willingly to the yoke of the king of Babylon, as God has commanded. Banished in this way from your state of virtue and spiritual knowledge as if from your native land, you suffer all these things and more besides, because in your pride and vain conceit you refuse to make full satisfaction for your offences and to 'take delight in afflictions, calamities and hardships' (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10), as St Paul did. For he knew that the humility produced by bodily sufferings safeguards the divine treasures of the soul; and for this reason he was content and endured patiently, both for his own sake and for the sake of those to whom he served as an example of virtue and faith, so that if they suffered when guilty, like the Corinthian who was censured (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-5), they might have him who suffers innocently as an encouragement and as a model of patience.

[V2] 186 St Maximos the Confessor Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice First Century

50. In relation to material things, the intellect is assisted by thought; but in relation to immaterial things, thought, unless repudiated, will be like 'a thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:7) to the intellect.

[V3] 54 Ilias the Presbyter A Gnostic Anthology Part IV

Thus he who is humble will turn away from his own thoughts and purposes, having no faith in them; indeed, he will be afraid, and seek advice with many tears, taking refuge in humility and self-criticism, and regarding spiritual knowledge and gifts of grace as great liabilities. But the arrogant man will promptly insist upon his own thoughts, ignoring the warning of St John Klimakos that we should not search prematurely for things that have their appointed time. He also ignores St Isaac's counsel that we should not enter in recklessly, but should give thanks in silence. Nor does he listen to St John Chrysostom when he says, 'I do not know', having learned to say this from St Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2-3); or to St John of Damaskos when he says of Adam that he embarked prematurely on the contemplation of sensible realities. For the stomachs, of infants are too tender for solid food and need milk, as St Paul says (cf. 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14). That is why we should not attempt to embark on contemplation when it is not yet time for contemplation. Let us first acquire in ourselves the mothers of the virtues, and then spiritual knowledge will come spontaneously through the grace of Christ: to whom be glory through all the ages. Amen.

[V3] 250 St Peter of Damaskos Book II Twenty-Four Discourses XIII Knowledge of the Angelic Orders

Such is the situation with regard to things that pertain to nature. When the matter in question is something that lies beyond nature, whether it be sensible or intelligible, or even a written phrase, the saints know about it through the gift of prophecy and through revelation, provided that such knowledge is given them by the Holy Spirit. But if this knowledge is not given them, and if for their own good the matter remains beyond their understanding, they are not ashamed to speak the truth and to confess their human weakness, saying with St Paul, 'I do not know; God knows' (2 Cor. 12:2). As Solomon said, 'There are three things of which I am ignorant and a fourth which I do not know' (Prov. 30:18. LXX). Again, St John Chrysostom says, 'I do not know; and if the heretics call me an unbeliever, let them call me a fool as well'

[V3] 267 St Peter of Damaskos Book II Twenty-Four Discourses XXIII Holy Scripture

44. The person who is born in the Spirit is in a certain manner perfect, just as we call an infant perfect when all his limbs are sound. But the Lord has not bestowed the grace of the Spirit so that one may fall into sin. Men are themselves the cause of the evils into which they fall: not living in accordance with grace they are taken captive by evil. Man can lapse through his own natural thoughts if he is negligent or inattentive or presumptuous. St Paul himself says: 'To stop me from growing unduly elated I was given a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan' (2 Cor. 12:7). You see how even those who have attained such great heights as St Paul stand in need of protection. Yet if man did not give the devil the opportunity he would not be forcibly dominated by him. Because of this, his actions are not to be imputed either to Christ or to the devil. But if finally he submits to the grace of the Spirit, he is on the side of Christ. If this is not the case, even though he is born in the Spirit - that is to say, even though he participates in the Holy Spirit - yet because of his actions he follows the will of Satan. For if it were the Lord or Satan who had forcibly seized hold of him, then he himself would not be the cause of his falling into hell or of his attaining God's kingdom.

[V3] 304 St Symeon Metaphrastis

19. Through God's economy, this same demon is a test, a thorn and a trial for those who, having attained the first, aspire to the second degree of dispassion. So long as the demon troubles them, they recall the weakness of their nature and do not become conceited because of the 'abundance of the revelations' (2 Cor. 12:7) that they have received through contemplation. Rather, keenly aware, of the law that wars against the law of the intellect (cf. Rom. 7:23), they repudiate even the passion-free recollection of sin, lest by recalling it they re-experience the

defilement it engenders and thereby let the eye of the intellect lapse from the heights of contemplation.

[V4] 113 Nikitas Stithatos

32. Truth is not evinced by looks, gestures or words, and God reposes not in these things but in a contrite heart, a humble spirit and a soul illumined by the knowledge of God. Sometimes we see someone speaking to all comers in an outwardly obsequious and humble manner, while inwardly he pursues the praise of men and is filled with self-conceit, guile, malice and rancor. And there are times when we see someone fighting for righteousness outwardly with lofty words of wisdom, taking a stand against falsehood or the transgression of God's laws, and looking only to the truth, while within he is all modesty, humility, and love for his fellow-men. Sometimes also we see such a person glorying in the Lord after the manner of St Paul, who when he gloried in the Lord said, 'I will glory in my infirmities' (2 Cor. 12:9).

[V4] 116 Nikitas Stithatos

44. The mystical and perfective stage pertains to those who have already passed through all things and have come to 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). It is characterized by the transcending of the sphere of demonic powers and of all sublunar things, by our attaining to the higher celestial ranks, approaching the primordial light and plumbing the depths of God through the Spirit. It involves immersing our contemplative intellect in the inner principles of providence, justice and truth, and also the interpretation of the arcane symbolism, parables and obscure passages in Holy Scripture. Its final goal is our initiation into the hidden mysteries of God and our being filled with ineffable wisdom through union with the Holy Spirit, so that each becomes a wise theologian in the great Church of God, illuminating others with the inner meaning of theology. He who has reached this point through the deepest humility and compunction has, like another Paul, been caught up into the third heaven of theology, and has heard indescribable things which he who is still dominated by the sense-world is not permitted to hear (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4); and he experiences unutterable blessings, such as no eye has seen or ear heard (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). He becomes a steward of God's mysteries (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1), for he is God's mouthpiece, and through words he communicates these mysteries to other people; and in this he finds blessed repose. For he is now perfected in the perfect God, united in the company of other theologians with the supreme angelic powers of the Cherubim and Seraphim, in whom dwells the principle of wisdom and spiritual knowledge.

[V4] 152 Nikitas Stithatos On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts

9. For as long as you live do not abandon prayer even for a single day on the excuse of illness. Heed St Paul, who says, 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10). If you act in this spirit, your profit will be greater, and the prayer - grace assisting - will soon make you well. Wherever the Spirit brings solace, illness and listlessness are short-lived.

[V4] 191 Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia

In this light it miraculously surveys supramundane things, being either still joined to the materiality to which it was originally linked, or else separated from it - this depending on the level that it has attained. For it does not ascend on the wings of the mind's fantasy, for the mind always wanders about as though blind, without possessing an accurate and assured understanding either of sensory things not immediately present to it or of transcendent intelligible realities. Rather it ascends in very truth, raised by the Spirit's ineffable power, and with spiritual and ineffable apperception it hears words too sacred to utter (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4) and sees invisible things. And it becomes entirely rapt in the miracle of it, even when it is no longer there, and it rivals the tireless angelic choir, having become truly another angel of God upon earth. Through itself it brings every created thing closer to God, for it itself now participates in all things and even in Him who transcends all, inasmuch as it has faithfully conformed itself to the divine image.

[V4] 317 St Gregory Palamas To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia

The man seized by spiritual joy is astounded by the many blessings that God in his grace has bestowed on him, and he loves his Benefactor. But he who obdurately indulges in luxury and splendor, like the rich man (cf. Luke 16:19), thinks that those consumed by fear and facing trials and temptation suffer in this way because of their sins, and in his comfort and complacency he despises them. He imagines that he deserves his easy life, although in fact he does not deserve it at all; for, blinded by his inane love for the ephemeral, he has made himself unworthy of the life held in store. He may even think that he has attained the state of love and on account of this has received greater benefits than others have. This shows that he is totally unaware of God's forbearance towards him. For this reason he will find himself defenseless on the day of judgment and deservedly will hear the words, 'You received your good things during your lifetime' (Luke 16:25). All this is obvious from the fact that there are many non-believers of this type, who are benefited by God without deserving it; yet no one with any sense would call them blessed or say that they are worthy of being loved by God, or that they love God and perhaps on this account live comfortably in the present life.

[V3] 217 St Peter of Damaskos Book II Twenty-Four Discourses *III* The Two Kinds of Fear

